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International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

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I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 15 September 1998, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-third session the item entitled "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item at its 2nd and 10th to 12th meetings, on 17 September and from 22 to 27 October 1998, and held a general debate on the item at the 10th to 12th meetings (see A/C.4/53/SR.2 and 10-12).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (A/53/265);

(c) Note verbale dated 23 October 1998 from the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/C.4/53/8).

4. At its 2nd meeting, on 17 September, the Committee decided to establish an open-ended Working Group on International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to be chaired by the delegation of India, to prepare the draft resolution on the item.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 20* (A/53/20).

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5. At the 10th meeting, on 22 October, the Chairman of the Fourth Committee made an introductory statement (see A/C.4/53/SR.10).

6. At the same meeting, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space introduced the report of that Committee[1] on behalf of the Chairman of the Committee.

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.4/53/L.7

7. At the 12th meeting, on 27 October, the representative of *India*, on behalf of the Working Group, introduced a draft resolution entitled "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space" (A/C.4/53/L.7).

8. At the same meeting, the Committee acceded to the request made by the representative of India, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Working Group, that the following statement be reflected in the report of the Committee:

> "During the discussions on the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), the question of the participation of the least developed countries was also brought up in the Working Group. The feeling of the Working Group is that the matter should be brought to the attention of the Preparatory Committee for UNISPACE III. In this connection, the Office for Outer Space Affairs, in its role as the executive secretariat for UNISPACE III, was requested to explore every possibility to seek voluntary contributions and to report thereon to the Preparatory Committee on the status."

9. Also at the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.4/53/L.7, without a vote (see para. 10).

III. Recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

10. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 51/122 of 13 December 1996 and 52/56 of 10 December 1997,

Deeply convinced of the common interest of mankind in promoting the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes and in continuing efforts to extend to all States the benefits derived therefrom, and also of the importance of international cooperation in this field, for which the United Nations should continue to provide a focal point,

Reaffirming the importance of international cooperation in developing the rule of law, including the relevant norms of space law and their important role in international cooperation for the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, and of the widest possible adherence to international treaties that promote the peaceful uses of outer space,

Concerned about the possibility of an arms race in outer space,

Recognizing that all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, should contribute actively to the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space as an essential condition for the promotion of international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes,

Considering that space debris is an issue of concern to all nations,

Noting the progress achieved in the further development of peaceful space exploration and applications as well as in various national and cooperative space projects, which contributes to international cooperation, and the importance of further international cooperation in this field,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General[2] on the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space,[3]

Noting with satisfaction that the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), will be convened at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 19 to 30 July 1999 as a special session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space open to all States Members of the United Nations,

Having considered the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the work of its forty-first session,[4]

1. *Endorses* the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the work of its forty-first session;[4]

2. *Invites* States that have not yet become parties to the international treaties governing the uses of outer space[5] to give consideration to ratifying or acceding to those treaties;

3. *Notes* that, at its thirty-seventh session, the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in its working group, continued its work as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/56;[6]

4. *Endorses* the recommendations of the Committee that the Legal Subcommittee, at its thirty-eighth session, taking into account the concerns of all countries, particularly those of developing countries, should:

(a) Continue its consideration of review and possible revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space;[7]

(b) Continue, through its working group, its consideration of matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space and to the character and utilization of the

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[2] A/53/265.

[3] See *Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, Vienna, 9–21 August 1982* and corrigenda (A/CONF.101/10 and Corr.1 and 2).

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 20* (A/53/20).

[5] Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (resolution 2222 (XXI), annex); Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space (resolution 2345 (XXII), annex); Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects (resolution 2777 (XXVI), annex); Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space (resolution 3235 (XXIX), annex); and Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (resolution 34/68, annex).

[6] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 20* (A/53/20), sect. II.D.

[7] See resolution 47/68.

geostationary orbit, including consideration of ways and means to ensure the rational and equitable use of the geostationary orbit without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunication Union;

(c) Continue its review of the status of the five international legal instruments governing outer space and establish a working group to consider the item;

(d) Continue its consideration of other matters, including informal consultations on specific proposals already made for possible new agenda items for the Legal Subcommittee;

5. *Also endorses* the recommendation of the Committee that the Legal Subcommittee, at its thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth sessions, should suspend consideration in its working group of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space pending the results of the work in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, without prejudice to the possibility of reconvening its working group on that item if, in the opinion of the Legal Subcommittee, sufficient progress was made in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at its session in 2000 to warrant the reconvening of the working group;

6. *Notes* that, in the context of paragraph 4 (c) above, the Legal Subcommittee would implement the work plan that it adopted at its thirty-sixth session;[8]

7. *Endorses* the recommendations and agreements concerning the organization of work in the Legal Subcommittee;

8. *Notes with satisfaction* that, in accordance with paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 52/56, the Committee, at its forty-first session, reviewed further its requirements for unedited verbatim transcripts and agreed to continue the use of those transcripts;

9. *Takes note* of the agreement reached by the Committee at its fortieth session on the composition of the bureaux of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies for the second term starting in 2000, in the context of the implementation of the measures relating to the working methods of those bodies, which were endorsed by the General Assembly in paragraph 11 of its resolution 52/56;

10. *Notes* that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, at its thirty-fifth session, continued its work as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/56;[9]

11. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee continued to consider on a priority basis the agenda item on space debris and that the work of the Subcommittee at its thirty-fifth session concentrated on the topic of space debris mitigation measures, on the basis of the multi-year work plan adopted by the Subcommittee at its thirty-second session;[10]

12. *Notes* that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, during its consideration of the item on space debris at its thirty-sixth session, will concentrate on finalizing the full technical report on space debris for adoption;

13. *Endorses* the recommendations of the Committee that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, at its thirty-sixth session, taking into account the concerns of all countries, particularly those of developing countries, should consider the following priority items:

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[8] See A/AC.105/674, annex II.B.

[9] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 20* (A/53/20), sect. II.C.

[10] A/AC.105/605, para. 83.

(a) Preparations for the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) by the Advisory Committee for UNISPACE III;

(b) Space debris;

(c) The United Nations Programme on Space Applications and the coordination of space activities within the United Nations system;

14. *Also endorses* the recommendation of the Committee that in view of the abbreviated schedule of work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at its thirty-sixth session and the preparatory work to be conducted for UNISPACE III, the Subcommittee should suspend, as an exception, its consideration of the following items for one year, to be resumed at its thirty-seventh session:

(a) General exchange of views;

(b) Matters relating to remote sensing of the Earth by satellites, including, *inter alia*, applications for developing countries;

(c) Use of nuclear power sources in outer space;

(d) Questions relating to space transportation systems and their implications for future activities in space;

(e) Examination of the physical nature and technical attributes of the geostationary orbit and of its utilization and applications, including, *inter alia*, in the field of space communications, as well as other questions relating to space communications developments, taking particular account of the needs and interests of developing countries;

(f) Matters relating to life sciences, including space medicine;

(g) Progress in national and international space activities related to the Earth's environment, in particular progress in the International Geosphere-Biosphere (Global Change) Programme;

(h) Matters relating to planetary exploration;

(i) Matters relating to astronomy;

(j) The theme fixed for the special attention of the Subcommittee; the Committee on Space Research and the International Astronautical Federation, in liaison with Member States, should be invited to arrange a symposium, with as wide a participation as possible, to be held during the first week of the session of the Subcommittee, to complement discussions within the Subcommittee on the special theme;

15. *Notes* that the theme for the special attention of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at its thirty-seventh session will be identified by the Subcommittee at its thirty-sixth session;

16. *Endorses* the four-year work plan for consideration of the agenda item on the use of nuclear power sources in outer space adopted by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at its thirty-fifth session, and agrees that the Subcommittee should reconvene its Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space at its thirty-seventh session to conduct its work in accordance with the work plan;

17. *Notes* that the Working Group of the Whole to Evaluate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee concluded its evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations of the Second Conference, and

takes note of the conclusions of the Working Group of the Whole, as endorsed by the Committee and as contained in the report of the Working Group of the Whole;[11]

18. *Notes with satisfaction* that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/56, the Working Group of the Whole assisted the Advisory Committee for UNISPACE III in its preparatory work for the Conference, and agrees that the Advisory Committee should reconvene the Working Group of the Whole at its 1999 session to finalize its preparatory work;

19. *Endorses* the United Nations Programme on Space Applications for 1999, as proposed to the Committee by the Expert on Space Applications;[12]

20. *Notes with satisfaction* that, in accordance with paragraph 30 of General Assembly resolution 50/27 of 6 December 1995, the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific continued its education programme in 1998 and that significant progress has been achieved in establishing regional centres for space science and technology education in the other regions;

21. *Notes* that, pursuant to the request in paragraph 29 of General Assembly resolution 51/123, the Committee and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, at their 1998 sessions, carried out the tasks entrusted to them in their roles as the Preparatory Committee and the Advisory Committee, respectively, for UNISPACE III;

22. *Endorses* the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee at its 1998 session, concerning, in particular, the structure of the draft report and the provisional rules of procedure of UNISPACE III, as contained in its report,[13] and requests the Preparatory and Advisory Committees and the executive secretariat to carry out their tasks in accordance with those recommendations;

23. *Notes with satisfaction* the holding of the preparatory regional conference at Kuala Lumpur from 18 to 22 May 1998 and its recommendations, the preparatory regional conference at Concepción, Chile, from 12 to 16 October 1998 and the Concepción Declaration of 16 October[14] and the preparatory regional conference at Rabat from 26 to 30 October 1998, and notes with satisfaction that a preparatory regional conference will be held in Romania from 25 to 29 January 1999;

24. *Encourages* all Member States, organizations within the United Nations system and other international organizations with space activities, as well as space-related industries and national organizations, invited through their Governments, to contribute actively to achieving the objectives of UNISPACE III;

25. *Invites* Member States, space agencies and space-related international and national organizations to support the preparations for UNISPACE III by providing the executive secretariat with junior or senior experts, by co-sponsoring activities related to UNISPACE III and by providing other voluntary contributions;

26. *Notes with satisfaction* that in order to service UNISPACE III, to the extent feasible, within existing resources, the savings realized by the Committee and its subsidiary bodies in 1998 and 1999 in conference-servicing resources by shortening, as an exception, their regular annual sessions, will be utilized to service UNISPACE III;

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[11] A/AC.105/697, annex II.

[12] See A/AC.105/693 and Corr.1, sect. I.

[13] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 20* (A/53/20), sect. II.B.

[14] A/C.4/53/8, annex.

27. *Agrees* that pre-Conference consultations by all States Members of the United Nations should be convened on 18 July 1999 at the site of UNISPACE III, within existing resources, and requests the Preparatory Committee to report during the consultations on the work it has conducted;

28. *Requests* UNISPACE III to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session;

29. *Agrees* that in view of the abbreviated schedule of work of the Committee at its forty-second session and the preparatory work to be conducted for UNISPACE III, the Committee should suspend its work on the following items for one year, to be resumed at its forty-third session;

(a) Consideration, as a matter of priority, of ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes;

(b) Consideration of the item entitled "Spin-off benefits of space technology: review of current status";

30. *Recommends* that more attention be paid to all aspects related to the protection and the preservation of the outer space environment, especially those potentially affecting the Earth's environment;

31. *Considers* that it is essential that Member States pay more attention to the problem of collisions of space objects, including those with nuclear power sources, with space debris, and other aspects of space debris, calls for the continuation of national research on this question, for the development of improved technology for the monitoring of space debris and for the compilation and dissemination of data on space debris, considers that, to the extent possible, information thereon should be provided to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, and agrees that international cooperation is needed to expand appropriate and affordable strategies to minimize the impact of space debris on future space missions;

32. *Urges* all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to contribute actively to the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space as an essential condition for the promotion of international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes;

33. *Emphasizes* the need to increase the benefits of space technology and its applications and to contribute to an orderly growth of space activities favourable to sustained economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, particularly in the developing countries;

34. *Requests* the specialized agencies and other international organizations to continue and, where appropriate, enhance their cooperation with the Committee and to provide it with progress reports on their work relating to the peaceful uses of outer space;

35. *Requests* the Committee to continue its work, in accordance with the present resolution, to consider, as appropriate, new projects in outer space activities, and to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, including its views on which subjects should be studied in the future.